5: Crowder J-5 (1955-1961) 1962
MS37 Senegal MS37
Wolof MS30

The French sociologist Mercier has already remarked the fundamental homogeneity of Senegal's main ethnic groups, which 'Whatever their cultural differences and whatever their traditional hostility to one another (which has by no means completely disappeared) all had the same type of social and political organisation.'

Of the major groups the Wolof and the Lebou are for all intents and purposes indistinguishable, the Lebou being the Wolof-speaking inhabitants of the Cape Verde peninsula. The Serer are also very closely related to the Wolof, being considered as tribal cousins. The Toucouleur, Serer and Fula are traditionally connected, it being held that the Toucouleur are the result of an ancient mixing between the Serers, with whom they have a strong joke-relationship, and the Fulas whose language is very close to their own. Thus nearly three-quarters of the population have closer historical and ethnic connexions than exist in any other area of West Africa save Hausaland in Northern Nigeria. With the exception of the Serers, of whom a substantial minority is Christian, these people are almost exclusively Muslim. They also tend today to use Wolof as a lingua franca. Even the Diola, from the Casamance, which is in many ways a minority area of Senegal, especially because it is cut off from the north by the Gambia, have strong traditional connexions with the Serer and assert in effect that they are descended from the same ancestor. This leaves only the Mandingo people out of the pattern and as we shall see they do tend to be a minority group in Senegal.

There is thus at the basis of Senegalese society an indigenous homegeneity that is nothing to do with the French policy of assimilation, and which has been greatly encouraged by a common adherence to Islam, where Marabouts or religious leaders of one tribe have considerable influence over Muslims of other ethnic origins.

The French administration, however, through its policy of direct rule did in fact make one major contribution towards